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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9149
INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS WARSAW 001135

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE MARY GLANTZ, STATE FOR OES/IHB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC ECON GM PREL SOCI TBIO

SUBJECT: H1N1 IN POLAND: QUIET FOR NOW

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Poland's Chief Sanitary Inspectorate reports no deaths related to H1N1 and no major outbreaks. While Polish officials are watching the situation closely, they do not plan to implement extraordinary measures absent a dramatic change in the disease's behavior, despite substantial media attention to the situation in Ukraine. Health officials plan to purchase 4 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine, but not until further testing is complete. For now, they are focused on educating the public on preventing the spread of all types of influenza. Poland will continue following EU and WHO recommendations while officials maintain direct contact with the US Center for Disease Control. Confirmed cases are very low (only 190) but that is likely the result of limited testing to discern between regular seasonal flu and H1N1. End Summary.

Only 190 Confirmed Cases?

¶2. (SBU) On Thursday, November 05, 2009, EconOff met with Chief Sanitary Inspectorate to discuss Poland's current preparedness for the H1N1 influenza. To date, there are only 190 confirmed cases of H1N1, very low compared to neighboring Germany's 30,000 and Ukraine's 250,000. However, there are approximately 10,000 reported cases of influenza-like illnesses, which would include unconfirmed cases of the H1N1 strain. Furthermore, Poles do not regularly seek medical attention for what they consider to be seasonal symptoms. No deaths have resulted from H1N1 and only one critical case from last Spring, which involved an AmCit child who had traveled from the United States, have been recorded. Poland is following EU and WHO recommendations.

¶3. (SBU) Regarding the drastically lower numbers of confirmed cases, the Chief Inspectorate reported that not all flu-like cases are tested for H1N1, which is why the numbers are so much lower than in neighboring countries. Only 5% of General Practitioners are required, under the Sentinel System, to test all patients with flu-like systems. The Sentinel System is a select group of doctors in each region that participate in reporting on all respiratory illnesses to the Ministry of Health. Some independent reporting of H1N1 has occurred when patients specifically mentioned travel to western Ukraine, but these numbers are minimal.

For Now: Information but no Vaccination

¶4. (SBU) There are no plans for closing borders or schools, or limiting travel. Poland has 4 million H1N1 vaccines on order for the first priority group, in accordance with WHO guidelines, but is awaiting research confirming that the vaccine safe before final purchase (NOTE: Officials would not

specify the research they had in mind). The Ministry of Health is conducting an intense informational campaign, which relays information for all types of influenza. While taking the necessary action to inform and treat H1N1 influenza, the Chief Inspectorate views seasonal influenza as a much greater threat to the Polish community.

15. (SBU) The Ministry of Health is also standing firm on not committing to purchase the H1N1 vaccines until further testing shows that it is safe. The Chief Inspectorate stated they were pressured by an unnamed pharmaceutical company to purchase the vaccine, but the test results were not satisfactory and the contract would have freed the company from any liability. In the meantime, the seasonal influenza vaccine is available and being distributed. However, it is estimated that only 5% of the Polish population receives the vaccine and only 6% of medical doctors choose to take the vaccine themselves or even recommend it for their patients. Hence, the Ministry of Health must go against a population's superstition against vaccinations and is vigorously campaigning to educate about all kinds of influenza and encourage healthy living, which, they argue, includes vaccination.

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